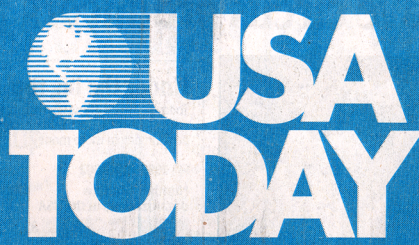




Roger Clemens: Allows one run on three hits.
By Brian Tietz, US Presswire

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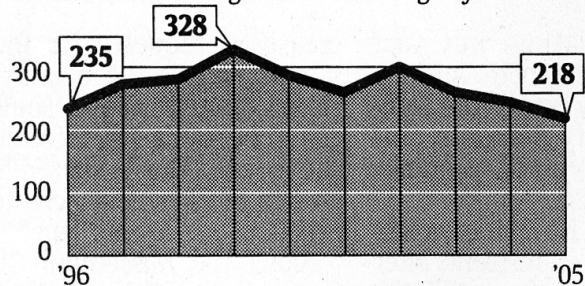
■ Bruce Springsteen on why he returned to the heart of folk, 3D

4A · WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2006 · USA TODAY

Nation

Making the case for treatment

Baltimore officials say drug treatment has helped reduce deaths related to drug overdoses among city residents.



Source: Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Baltimore sees steep decline in drug overdoses

Investments in treatment credited for much of drop

By Donna Leinwand
USA TODAY

Baltimore, a city long plagued by some of the highest crime and drug-overdose rates in the nation, has improved dramatically on both fronts partly because of a massive investment in drug treatment programs, city officials said Tuesday.

Drug overdoses and property crimes in Baltimore are at decade lows, according to statistics the city released Tuesday. Drugs killed 218 Baltimore residents in 2005, down 33.5% from a peak in 1999, when 328 people died from drug overdoses, Baltimore Health Commissioner Josh Sharfstein said. Such incidents have declined in cities across the USA in recent years, but Baltimore's figures represent particularly steep declines.

Sharfstein and other Baltimore officials credit huge spending increases on drug treatment and improvements in policing, efforts that drug treatment specialists said could serve as a national model for reducing the effects of illegal drugs on communities.

Baltimore has more than doubled its budget for drug treatment since 1997, spending \$52.9 million in 2005 to treat 28,672 people for drug addiction, up from \$20.3 million for 18,449 people nine years ago.

A key booster in Baltimore's drug treatment effort has been financier George Soros, whose foundation gave the city \$25 million to rejuvenate local treatment programs in 1997.

Soros said in an interview Tuesday that he was so pleased by Baltimore's results that his foundation is offering \$10 million in grants to cities that want to copy Baltimore's program.

Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley noted that Baltimore, a city of 643,000, had more than 300 homicides every year during the 1990s, but that the total has fallen below that mark for the past five years.

"We had become the most addicted and violent city in America," O'Malley said. "There is not a doubt in my mind that Baltimore's resurgence ... is a result of our making our city a healthy and safer place by investing in public safety and public health."

Baltimore's crime and addiction rates still exceed the national averages for midsize cities, but several public health and social indicators have shown dramatic improvements, Sharfstein said.

Calls to 911 for drug overdoses in Baltimore have dropped 16% since 2002, according to city statistics. Emergency room visits related to cocaine and heroin use are down 39% since 1995.

Increased drug treatment is partially responsible, said David Vlahov, director of research at the New York Academy of Medicine. "Does drug treatment account for all of that? No," Vlahov said. "But we know from studies that drug treatment is an important contribution to the endpoint."

Providence Mayor David Cicilline said he's paying close attention to Baltimore's expansion of drug treatment. "I think the efforts in Baltimore are a model," he said. "But I think the other piece of the story is investing in prevention."